



OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN

PAPERS RELATING TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ACCOMPANYING THE ANNUAL MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT TO THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FORTIETH CONGRESS

Mr. Morris to Mr. Seward

No. 209.]

LEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, *Constantinople*, May 31, 1867.

SIR: In compliance with the instructions contained in despatch No. 141, dated 10th ultimo, I have the honor to report the following explanatory observations of Mr. Ristich, political agent of Servia, at this capital, relative to the abuses and oppressions to which the Jewish population of Servia are said to be subjected, in the memorial of Mr. M. S. Isaacs, of New York, to the State Department.

There is a Jewish population of 1,300 in Servia. The Jews are on a footing of equality with the Servians, and they possess the same civil and political rights. Their testimony is received in the courts of justice according to their form of religious belief. They are admitted to the civil and military service, and they enjoy the right of suffrage and are eligible as deputies. [Page 4.] They suffer no persecution of any nature, and there exists no law to their disadvantage, nor has the government established any line of demarcation between them and the other communities which dwell in the Servian territory. The memorial to the department, Mr. Ristich said, quotes no law or regulation of the kind and deals only in general complaints which have no real foundation other than the prejudice which exists against the Jews, among the people, on account of their usurious practices, and especially on the part of the agriculturists. Usury, he remarked, has been extremely prejudicial to the agriculturists of Roumania, and it is this example which indisposes the Servians against its mischievous operations among themselves.

The Jews formerly monopolized almost all the trade of the Servian capital, but progress and civilization have of late brought the Servians into commercial pursuits, and the Jews being unable to withstand their competition, now desire to settle in the rural districts. It is from this source proceed their complaints against the Servian government. The rural population refuse to receive them, and the Servian communes being autonomic, the government has not the power to oblige the people to admit among them their Jewish fellow-subjects. The national assembly is also in unison on this subject with the communes of the interior. The Jews are not prohibited from travelling or trading in the interior; the latter privilege they avail themselves of as freely now as heretofore.

They may reside at Belgrade, and there are as many as 73 families in the interior towns, viz: 20 at Chabatz, 4 at Oube, 2 at Kragonevatz, 4 at Obrenovatz, 6 at Swilainatz, 15 at Smederevo, 2 at Negotine, and 20 at Pojarevatz.

It is objected to the Jews of Servia that they do not identify themselves with its fortunes and with its people. They live apart as a distinct race, know nothing of the Servian language, and speak exclusively Hebro-Spanish.

After having acquired competence and ease, they leave the country, and invest their capital in banking and trading enterprises in Vienna and other German cities. It is further alleged to their reproach that they are destitute of a patriotic spirit, and that they have taken no part in defending the interests and liberty of Servia.

During the bombardment of Belgrade, Mr. Ristich says they all abandoned it, while the other inhabitants remained to defend the national capital.

The moral and intellectual condition of the Jews of Servia is not high. They are particularly addicted to usury, and it is for this that the rural populations oppose their settlement among them. To aid them in a better training of their children, the teachers of their schools are paid by the government, as they will not frequent the Servian schools. In the annual budget a certain sum is also set apart for the support of a rabbi, in case the Jews of Belgrade should decide to choose one, but to this they have given no consideration.

The government of Servia, hereditary in the family of Obrenowitch, is a constitutional system, I deem it proper to add. The prince rules with a responsible ministry, and the concurrence of a senate and a national assembly. The principality is divided into departments, subdivided into arrondissements, each containing a certain number of communes. The chiefs or *kmetes* of the communes, and who unite the functions of mayor and justice of the peace, are elected by the people.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

E. JOY MORRIS.

Hon. WILLIAM H. SEWARD *Secretary of State, Washington, D. C.*